

Radhabai Kamble: Women's Leadership in the Labor Movement

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Introduction

The land of Vidarbha was famous for cotton production. Due to this, many industries related to textile industry were started. The number of cotton and pressing mills increased. Thousands of untouchable families were involved with the ' Koshti ' people in the weaving business . Untouchable families earned their livelihood by making thick cloth. A.D. In 1877, Jamshedji Tata started a textile mill called Empress Mill in Nagpur. Thousands of pieces of cloth started coming out of the mill. It became impossible for handloom cloth to compete with mechanically produced cloth. The handloom cloth market was captured by modern mill cloth. Many families engaged in weaving became unemployed. ² There were more number of untouchable families in it. He took refuge in Nagpur city in search of livelihood. Many of them were recruited as laborers in the Empress Mills.

Mr. Kisan Fagoji Bansod organized the unorganized workers of Nagpur. The ' Mazur Patrika ' was published weekly and read the questions of the workers. Kisan Fagoji Bansod tried to organize and create ideological awareness of workers in Nagpur in the early period. That is why the honor of being the first labor leader in Nagpur has to be given to him. In the later period, labor leaders like Dattopant Thengadi , Rambhau Ruikar, Revaram Kawade, Raosaheb Phule, Raghunath Hundkar , Radhabai Kamble etc. led the labor movement.

In the following period, women's leadership also developed in the labor movement. Women's issues were raised through their active participation. Among them, Radhabai Kamble from Nagpur has a very remarkable and significant contribution as the first woman leader in the labor movement. It has been analyzed and reviewed as follows.

The emergence of the first female leadership in the labor movement

The honor of being the first woman worker leader in pre-independence Nagpur labor movement goes to Radhabai Kamble. Radha Bai was born in Anand Nagar (formerly Maharpura) in Sitabardi, Nagpur. ³ Father's name was Pandurang Moon and mother's name was Mirabai. of family Economic conditions were very poor. Radha Bai had to drop out of school from the 3rd standard due to adverse circumstances. As a child, while bearing the brunt of social disparity and caste system, his inherent qualities of courage , perseverance, toughness etc. blossomed. At that time, the system of child marriage existed everywhere. Radha Bai got married to Narayan Kamble .

There was no difference in the life of Radhabai Kamble, who came as in-law, because her father-in-law's financial situation was also not good. A hard life was worshiped on his fifth. Husband Narayan Rao's condition was fragile. He used to get sick from time to time. Two sons Jagdish and Jeevan were born in it. There were more mouths to eat in the house. Husband's hospital expenses had increased. Stubborn Radhabai Kamble bravely faced the dire situation. But no one reached out for help. Radhabai Kamble joined Tata's Empress Mill No-5 as a mill worker, making it her life's goal to protect kunkwa and raise her children. ⁴ Radhabai's life got the right direction from here onwards.

Nagpur Mill Workers' Strike of 1919 and Radhabai Kamble's Participation :

In the year 1914, the First World War started. During the war, Empress Mill operated on twelve-hour shifts. At that time, the workers working in spinning got Rs 7 to 9 per month and the workers working in weaving got Rs 10 to 15 per month. The First World War ended in 1918. Empress mill owner had made huge profits by exploiting the labor of the workers during the war. The workers were hoping for an increase in wages. The management has not made any move regarding salary hike. As a result, discontent spread among the working class. During the mid-afternoon break, workers gathered at the cotton market. Revaram Kawade, Rajaram Wasnik, Ibrahim Mia made speeches and decided to go on strike for salary increase. He appealed to the male and female workers to participate in the strike. In this strike Radhabai Kamble was directly involved. The next day the workers went to work but refused to work. The workers were on sit-in strike for two days.⁵ On the third day, the mill manager Sir Bezanji Dadabhai Mehta called the workers' representatives Revaram Kawade , Rajaram Wasnik , Ibrahim Mia etc. to the office and asked them to submit a written statement of the workers' demands. Working hours should be reduced. Demands for double increase in wages , bonuses , maternity allowance for women workers , provision of nursery homes for children , provision of cheap grain shops , provision of free medicine for workers etc. were given in written form. Manager Sir Bezanji Dadabhai Mehta assured that other demands would be met, stating that demands like reduction of working hours , provident fund etc. were within the power of the central government. Wages of workers increased. Mill started a cheap grain store. Even though there was no official organization of the workers, the strike was successful with the strength of unity.⁶

Testimony of Radhabai Kamble before the Labor Commission of 1929:

Since the number of untouchable workers among the Nagpur mill workers was high, in the early days Mr. Kisan Fagoji Bansod had noticed. Organized the workers and tried to get justice for the workers through strikes , marches , statements etc. In this work Mr. Revaram Kawade , Mr. Thawre , Dhondiba master provided valuable support. The formation of the All India Trade Union Congress created vitality in the working class of the country. The working class in the big cities began to organize. He started fighting for his rightful demands. Revaram Kawade, the untouchable labor leader, has made a great contribution in shaping the labor movement of Nagpur. Being a worker himself, he was aware of the workers' problems.⁷ He attacked the mill management through an erudite and sardonic speech. In short, Radhabai Kamble started participating in the labor movement after being inspired by untouchable labor leaders like Kisan Fagoji Bansod , Revaram Kawade , Dhondiba Master etc. Radhabai's fearless and bold speech, who was taught to resist injustice and support the truth at a young age, gave rise to the downtrodden workers.

The early 20th century was not as progressive as it is today. At that time, it was not accepted in the society that a woman should lead the labor movement and participate in the movement.

The number of women workers was high among the mill workers of Nagpur. In 1929, Empress Mill had a total of 8,800 workers , of whom 1,880 were female workers.⁸ Women workers had many problems and difficulties. The mills had male supervisors to supervise the female workers. They sometimes take advantage of women. There were no separate toilets for women workers. There was no nursery facility for small children. There was no paid leave for female workers during the maternity period. For the first time, Radhabai Kamble drew attention to the

issue of women workers. Labor leader Mr. She was a member of ' Nagpur Mill Workers Union ' founded by Rambhau Ruikar , Revaram Kawade .⁹ Radhabai Kamble became popular among the working class due to her leadership qualities of helping and helping the workers in the face of obstacles . In 1929, a Labor Commission was appointed by the British Government to inspect the labourers. This commission visited industrial cities like Mumbai , Solapur , Nagpur etc. and tried to know the situation of the workers. During the visit to Nagpur, Labor Commission labor leader Shri. Babu Hardas , Mr. Raosaheb Thawre , Mr. Kalicharan Nandagawali as well as Radhabai Kamble as the women's representative separately testified.¹⁰ From this it is clear that Radhabai Kamble was leading the Nagpur labor movement.

Radhabai Kamble and Independent Labor Party:

In 1929, in the session of All India Trade Union Congress held at Nagpur under the chairmanship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose was elected as the president due to ideological differences. Displeased V. V. Giri , no. m. Joshi formed a separate organization called Indian Trade Union Federation.¹¹ There was no unity even in the Nagpur Mill Workers Association. Dr. Rambhau Ruikar's policy Untouchable workers who were inspired by the thought of Babasaheb Ambedkar were not liked. Untouchable workers did not whole heartedly support the policies of the mill unions as the political issues of Dalits were different. This often leads to quarrels ,There were fights. In the year 1933, after the arrest of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose by the British government, Nagpur Mill Union under the leadership of Rambhau Ruikar decided to observe hartal. Janata weekly reports that untouchable workers were beaten up by touchable workers due to their opposition to Rambhau Ruikar's policy.¹² This means that the untouchable working class was upset with the policy of the Nagpur Labor Union. India's textile industry collapsed due to the Great Depression. The workers went on strike as the owners of Nagpur's Empress Mill and Model Mill started cutting labor and wages. Rambhau Ruikar discussed with the model mill owner and approved the salary cut. This decision hurt the untouchable working class. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement had awakened the untouchables. Dalits got political rights under the Act of 1935, it was necessary to form a new political party to take full advantage of them. Keeping in view the ideal of the Labor Party in England , Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar founded ' Swadantar Mazur Party ' on August 15, 1936 in Mumbai . At that time the flag of Independent Labor Party was red.¹³ Adv. Raosaheb Phule , Revaram Kawade , Babu Hardas , Dr. Through the efforts of Panjabrao Deshmukh, a provincial branch of the Independent Labor Party was started in Varhad, Madhya Pradesh. Radhabai Kamble and thousands of disgruntled mill workers in Nagpur joined the Independent Labor Party. In the general election of 1937, Radhabai Kamble campaigned for the Labor Party in Nagpur Division. On April 14 , 1937, on behalf of the 'Imamwada ' Women's Reform Board, felicitated the people who were elected from the Independent Labor Party. Women speakers like Radhabai Kamble , Sakhubai Meshram , Anjanabai Deshbhartar etc.¹⁴ In short, Radhabai Kamble contributed greatly to the growth of the Independent Labor Party along with the leadership of the Nagpur labor movement.

Radhabai Kamble and All India Untouchable Women Council:

Along with men, women should also participate in large numbers in the struggle for social freedom of the untouchable society. Babasaheb Ambedkar thought. Akhil for that All India Women's Conferences were held in the pavilion of the Indian Untouchables Council. Welcome President of the Second All India Untouchable Women Parishad held at Nagpur Mrs. Kirtibai Patil

and Radhabai Kamble was elected as Vice President .¹⁵ The conference started on 20 July 1942 in a pavilion erected in Mohan Park. 25,000 Women Dilat women participated. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and other leaders were present on the dais. On this occasion, Radhabai Kamble presented the pains of women workers through an erudite and eloquent speech. In India, women mill workers , women weedy workers and women railway workers should get 21 days of ' casual leave ' and one month of entitled leave in a year. In case of injury while working, get compensation. After 20 years of employment, you should get a pension of at least Rs. 15 per month. Because men are appointed to supervise the women workers working in mills or other places, women have to suffer oppression and oppression , so the resolution that women workers should be appointed to supervise the women workers etc. was presented in the council and approved. ¹⁶ In short, Radhabai Kamble's skillful leadership is a testament to the respect and broad vision for the woman worker who came out of the house for the sake of the family.

Role of mill workers strike and Radhabai Kamble:

There were many ideological differences in the mill workers union of Nagpur. Some people used to oppose the strike for the demands of the workers. In 1941, the mill workers went on strike. The mill management ignored the workers' demands saying they were illegal. On 20 April 1941, Rambhau Ruikar held a meeting at Needham Mark and requested the workers to join the work. On the other hand, on 21 April 1941, Empress Mill no. In 5, Mohammad Ali, who led the workers, presented a statement of demands to the mill management. The strike continued saying that we have nothing to do with the organization. Radhabai Kamble's role was coordination regarding the strike of mill workers¹⁷ It is necessary for the workers to strike and protest for their rightful demands , but there should be a plan for how long to continue the strike and when to withdraw. If the strike goes on for a long time, the financial strain of the workers would have started the rabbit hole of the family. Radhabai Kamble seems to have taken a balanced stance of taking what she got and pursuing work for what she didn't get .

Women mill workers march on Nagpur ministry:

In 1949, the mill owners in Nagpur started a massive retrenchment of mill workers. Many women workers were also included in it. Due to dismissal, the problem of livelihood of the workers arose. Uneasiness spread among the working class as the smooth running of the world was suddenly disrupted. Radhabai Kamble, who had spent her entire life in the labor movement, started efforts to stop the retrenchment immediately and re-hire the laid-off workers. Met the mill management and requested them not to retrench workers. 10 Women Mill Workers March Nagpur was taken to the ministry. This march was led by Radhabai Kamble herself. The Labor Secretary of the Secretariat, Benhad, listened to the grievances of the women workers and promised to consider them sympathetically. A few days later, the labor cuts were halted.

Epilogue

In short, the entire life journey of Radhabai Kamble was a struggle. The mill itself Being a worker, he had experienced the pains and sufferings of the workers. Having unshakable loyalty to the thought of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Shri. Kisan Fagoji Bansod started working in the labor movement following the example of selfless social service of Shri Revaram Kawade. Testifying before the 1929 Commission, he presented the stark truth of the labor problem. While working for Swatantra Mazur Party , All India Scheduled Castes Federation, he set the ideal of what a worker and leader should be. While working in the All India Untouchable Women's

Parishad raised the issues of local women workers at the national level forum . By taking the march of women mill workers to the Nagpur Ministry, they introduced their leadership qualities to Vidarbha and Maharashtra.

Footnotes

1. Dr. Dongre K.K. Contribution of Nagpur City in Babasaheb Ambedkar's Movement , Publisher Sujit Murmade ,Nagpur 2012 , p. No. 32.
- 2 . Ibid p. No. 23 .
3. Ibid I p. 48.
4. Joshi P.B.H. , Parakrami Bhosale of Nagpur , Dyanesh Publications , Nagpur 2003 , p. No. 312.
5. Formerly , Dongre K.K. , p. no. 49.
6. Preceding , Maharashtra State Gazetteer , Nagpur District , p. No. 1.
7. Ibid, p. No. 1.
8. Preceding , Maharashtra State Gazetteer , Nagpur District , p. No. 479.
9. Formerly , Dongre K.K. , p. no. 76.
10. Preceding , Maharashtra State Gazetteer , Nagpur District , p. No. 514.
11. Census of India , Central Provinces 1871 , Part I , p. No. 37.
- 1 2.Census of India , Central Provinces and Berar , 1911 , Part-I , p. No. 220.
13. Preceding , Maharashtra State Gazetteer , Nagpur District , p. No. 498.
14. Ibid, p. No. 501.
15. Ibid , p. No. 504.
16. Formerly , Dongre K.K. , p. No. 76.
17. ShendeN.R . Dalitodharkar Guruvarya Bansod , Srishesh Prakashan , Nagpur 1981 , p. No. 120.